

Remarks by Ambassador Reuben E. Brigety, II
on the occasion of the
238th Birthday of the United States Marine Corps
Sheraton Hotel, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
November 9, 2013

Good Evening. It is a great honor for me to be here with you tonight on this momentous and meaningful occasion. The celebration of the birthday of the United States Marine Corps is an annual ritual of great importance. It is performed “in every clime and place,” from elegant ballrooms such as this one, to amphibious assault ships on station across the seven seas, to dusty and dangerous forward-operating bases in distant lands. Wherever Marines may be, they and their supporters take an evening to recall the heroic deeds of Marines past and present, to reflect on the values that form the backbone of the Corps, and to remember those fallen comrades who gave their lives in the service of their country.

I must tell you that there was a time in my life when I very much wanted to be a Marine. As a young midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy, I was deeply impressed by the strength, courage and character of the Marine Corps officers I met there. So, in the summer before my senior year at Annapolis, I signed up for the Academy’s Leatherneck Program at Marine Corps Base Quantico, “The Crossroads of the Marine Corps.” And after several weeks of getting lost in the woods for hours during night land navigation, being battered like a crash-test dummy during pugil stick bouts, and being exhausted by the endurance course, it

became readily apparent to me that both the Corps and our country would be better off if I applied my desire for service elsewhere.

Yet that summer in Quantico gave me both an undying respect for the Marine Corps and a deeper understanding of those hallowed words that are the creed of every Marine: *Semper Fidelis* – Always Faithful.

Faithful to the proud martial tradition that has made the Marine Corps the finest fighting force the world has ever known. From Vera Cruz to Belleau Wood; from Guadalcanal to Iwo Jima; From Pusan to Inchon; from Khe Sanh to Saigon; from Grenada to Haiti; From Panama City to Kuwait City; and from Kandahar to Baghdad, Marines across the generations have proven their courage and mettle to their enemies and to each other. With each victory and act of valor, they have served a warning to future foes, and an example to future recruits, of what to expect on the battlefield from a United States Marine. *Semper Fidelis* – Always Faithful.

Faithful to the protection of American citizens, no matter where they may be in the world. As they have demonstrated time and again, from Liberia to Lebanon and beyond, Marines are always ready to emerge from the sea and rescue U.S. civilians caught in harm's way. They guard American Presidents and secure American embassies. It is they who stand on a wall and keep watch over all of us, so that we may perform our duties and live our lives in safety. And as the Marine Corps Hymn boasts, even the very streets of heaven are guarded by United States Marines. *Semper Fidelis* – Always Faithful.

Faithful to a spirit of compassion every bit as strong as their *esprit de corps*. It was Marines who, as part of Operation Sea Angel, helped save the lives of tens of thousands of Bangladeshis devastated by Cyclone Marian in 1991. It was Marines who, less than 12 months later, stormed the beaches of Mogadishu to help stop a famine of biblical proportions so that starving Somalis could eat. And it is the Marines who, since 1947, have distributed nearly half a billion toys through their Toys for Tots Program, bringing a bit of holiday cheer to those children who would otherwise go without. From distant shores to the heartland of America, Marines have shown that they can do more than strike fear in the hearts of their enemies. They can also bring hope to the hearts of those in need. *Semper Fidelis* – Always Faithful.

Faithful to a tradition of producing extraordinary American leaders, both on the battlefield and off. Geniuses of warfare like Generals John LeJune and Chesty Puller; national heroes like Senators John Glenn and James Webb; and respected statesmen like Secretaries of State George Shultz and James Baker, all have rendered exceptional service to our country, bringing both credit to the Corps and inspiration to generations of marines yet to be. And in this litany of Marine Corps heroes, it is with pride and a heavy heart that I recall my Annapolis classmates who were killed in combat in Iraq: Major Douglas Zembiec, known as “The Lion of Fallujah” for his leadership and heroism during that epic battle, and Major Megan McClung, the highest ranking woman killed in the Iraq War and the first female Naval Academy graduate killed in combat. May the service and sacrifices of these legendary Marines inspire us all. *Semper Fidelis* – Always Faithful.

Faithful to the commitment to equality that is a defining principle of our country. From the first African-American Marines trained at Montford Point starting in 1942 to the first women fully integrated into the Marine Corps starting in 1948, the Marine Corps has made enormous strides toward inclusion and promotion of those who meet its rigorous standards. And today, the Corps remains the strongest fighting force in the world, precisely because it is comprised of Marines regardless of where they are from, how they look, or who they love – so long as they have what it takes to wear the Eagle, Globe and Anchor. *Semper Fidelis* – Always Faithful.

This evening, as we mark the 238th birthday of the United States Marine Corps, we remember how Marines over the centuries have always been faithful to America. And tonight, let us, the American People, pledge to always be faithful to them as well: our heroes, our protectors, and our pride.

May God bless you all, may God bless America, and may God bless the United States Marine Corps.

Thank You.